



Capped Wheatear

Hoëveldskaapwagter

Oenanthe pileata

The Capped Wheatear occurs widely in southern and East Africa, extending its range north of the equator only in Kenya. Within the atlas region, it has a large but discontinuous distribution with the largest population apparently occurring in the Kalahari, and another distinct and extensive area of high reporting rates in the winter-rainfall region of the western Cape Province. In the latter area the wheatlands of the Swartland (north of Cape Town 3318CD) and Rûens (southeast of Cape Town) are well-defined areas of high relative abundance. During the breeding season (see e.g. seasonal map September–October), the data indicate a clear break in distribution between the nominate race, which occupies most of South Africa, and the race in northern Botswana and Zimbabwe, *O. p. livingstonii*. There is also a break between *livingstonii* in the east and *neseri* in central and northern Namibia. The population in the coastal areas from the southern Cape Province to southern Namibia is also relatively isolated from that in the Transvaal, currently included in *pileata*; this population deserves further taxonomic investigation.

This conspicuous species cannot be misidentified easily, except as a juvenile, which resembles several other chats and wheatears.

Habitat: It has a preference for open areas with bare ground – including those resulting from burning, trampling or overgrazing – in grassy habitats and in the low scrub of the Karoo. There is a strong association with the Southern Kalahari and with other Kalahari and Karoo vegetation types. Association with Fynbos is largely secondary as a result of having adapted to tilled ground and fields of wheat ‘stubble’ (Hockey *et al.* 1989).

Movements: The models and seasonal distribution maps clearly show patterns of migratory movement. These are not easy to interpret, however; not least because the atlas data are in disagreement with published texts (e.g. Keith *et al.* 1992; Maclean 1993b), except in the case of Zimbabwe (Irwin 1981) and the Transvaal (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b).

Using the seasonal distribution maps in conjunction with the models, a number of features for the different populations can be identified. July–November most birds are on the breeding grounds. Four rather disjunct breeding strongholds are seen in relatively mesic areas: (a) along the west coast from the southern

Cape Province into southern Namibia; (b) in the southern Transvaal and adjacent hardveld in eastern Botswana; (c) from the Makgadikgadi in central Botswana north to the Caprivi and throughout most of Zimbabwe; (d) in central and northern Namibia. Soon after breeding, from November till the end of the summer-rainfall season in May, there is strong movement into more xeric Kalahari and Karoo regions, which also have summer rains. The higher-rainfall areas in Zimbabwe, the Transvaal and northern Botswana are almost completely vacated, while movements away from the west coast, with its winter-rainfall regime, appear to be more facultative. The pattern in Zone 1 is more complex, but appears to show mostly resident birds with a prolonged spring–summer breeding season, together with clear passage through the Zone in November–January and May–June.

The data do not support the suggestion that birds breed at both ends of the migratory path, once in the dry season in central Africa and once during the wet season in the Kalahari (Benson 1982b; Keith *et al.* 1992). The suggestion that movements and the occupation of the Kalahari are variable, and dependent on rainfall (Keith *et al.* 1992), is attractive and also indicated by Brewster (1991; 1996), but cannot be verified with the present analyses. In northern Botswana, large numbers summered in a good rainfall year (1969/70) but very few were found during a drought year (1970/71) (A.J. Tree pers. comm.).

Breeding: Records in Zones 5, 6 and 7 were tightly clustered in spring and early summer, and peaked September–November. In Zones 3 and 4, breeding is apparently more extended with a later October–December peak. August and September egg-laying peaks in Transvaal and Karoo respectively have been reported (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Winterbottom 1968a). Zone 1 shows a similarly extended period which may be linked to what appears to be a greater degree of residency in the west than in the east.

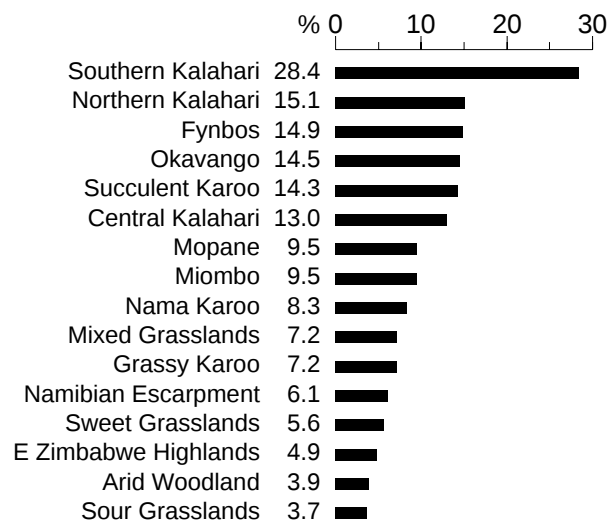
Interspecific relationships: It is dependent on rodent burrows in which it nests. Further north in Africa it defends territories against Palearctic migrant wheatears (Keith *et al.* 1992).

Historical distribution and conservation: The distribution is not likely to have changed recently (cf. Stark 1901), although the Capped Wheatear has benefited from bush clearance for agriculture.

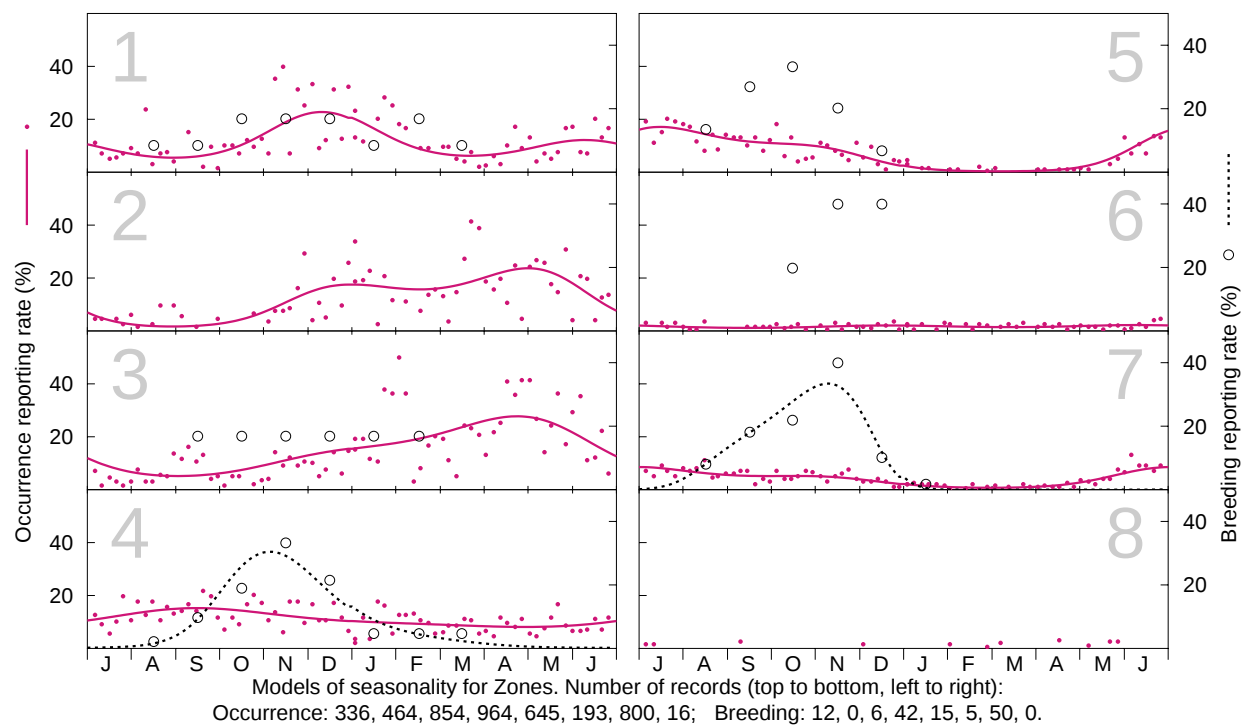
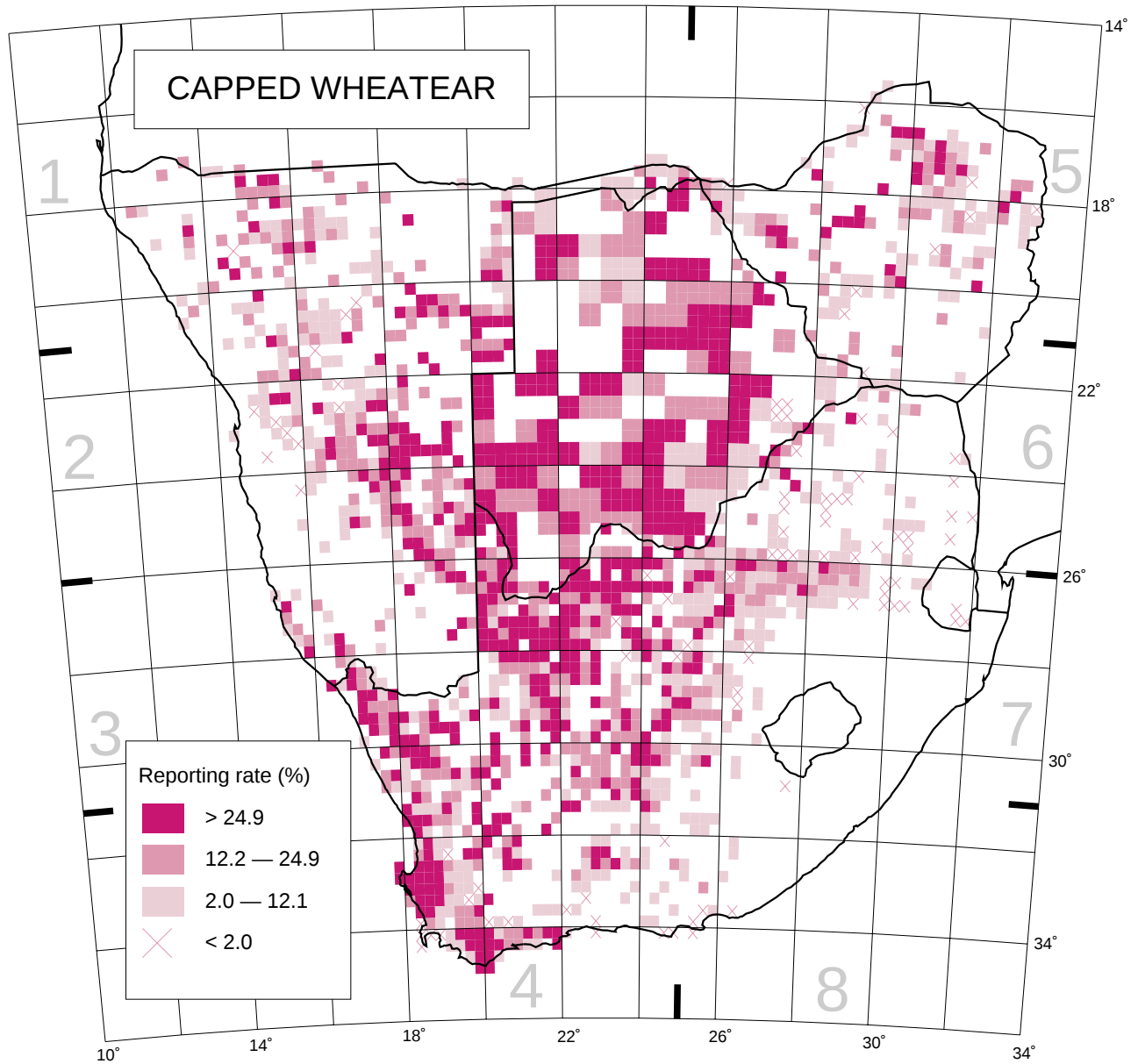
J.A. Harrison and M. Herremans

Recorded in 1867 grid cells, 41.2%
Total number of records: 10 441
Mean reporting rate for range: 13.8%

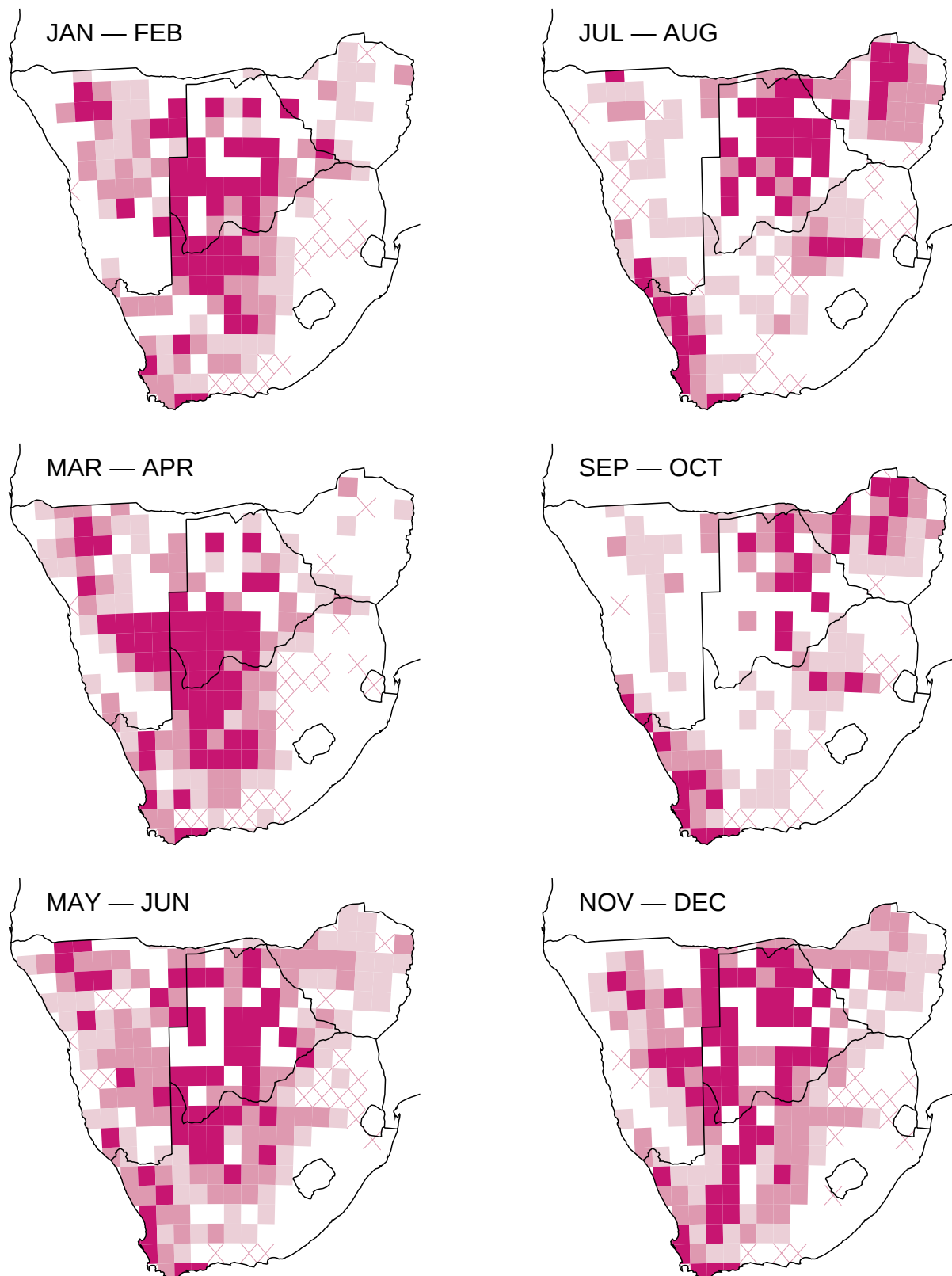
Reporting rates for vegetation types



Also marginally in Moist Woodland and Namib.



CAPPED WHEATEAR



Reporting rate (%)

> 21.8

8.2 — 21.8

2.0 — 8.1

< 2.0

Seasonal distribution maps; one-degree grid.